



File Code: 1950

Date: December 12, 2013

Dear Friends of the Shawnee National Forest

The Shawnee National Forest (SNF) is seeking your involvement in the process of preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) for an Oak Forest Restoration project. I am requesting your input in the scoping process as required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) 40 CFR 1500-1508.

Background

An Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) at the SNF is beginning an analysis to implement the Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) in the Ramsey Branch project area in the southeastern section of the SNF approximately 1 mile east of Eddyville, IL.

The Ramsey Branch project area, 80 acres, is primarily forested in a mature shortleaf pine forest with shade tolerant species, such as red maple, beech, black gum, and winged elm, in the understory. There are populations of shade intolerant seedlings such as red oak, white oak, black oak and hickories in the project area as well. Ramsey Branch, a riparian zone, is located in the southern portion of the project area.

The area suffers from a shortleaf pine forest stagnation meaning trees are uniform in terms of species, age, and height. This limits forest characteristics that optimize the availability of food and shelter for a diversity of wildlife species. Native oak and hickories are being prevented from developing in the mid-story thus minimizing the amount of forage they produce. The proposed actions encourage resilient forest conditions through silvicultural treatments including commercial thinning and reforestation of native hardwood species that will enhance the diversity of tree types and structures.

Purpose and Need for Action(s)

The need for this project has been identified in the Forest Plan; desired conditions include a wide-range of wildlife habitat and multiple forest age classes, structures, and types. The Forest Plan states that Even- Aged Hardwood Forest (EH) will have “stands of hardwood trees in various age and size classes interspersed with both permanent and temporary openings. Stands range from seedlings to mature age and vary in size and shape. Oak and hickory and associated understories dominate.”



The Ramsey Branch project area consists of an over-story dominated by a non-native shortleaf pine species. Implementing forest management practices in this area will increase light levels to the forest floor by opening up the over-story and removing shade-tolerant understory trees. Fire has been reintroduced into this fire adapted eco-system under a separate decision dated October 10, 2005. This activity has reduced hazardous fuels, encouraged the growth of native species such as oaks, hickories, and will stimulate wildflowers and grasses once the understory has been released to support a diversity of wildlife habitat. Forest health will be an additional benefit by reducing tree overcrowding which improves tree vigor reducing the occurrence of non-native invasive species, forest diseases, and insect outbreaks.

This project, by improving forest conditions, will also encourage dispersed recreation. Removing undergrowth increases access and visibility into the forest interior for hunting, hiking, wildlife viewing, and scenic driving opportunities. Existing roads will be available for horseback riding.

The project supports specific prescriptions, goals, and objectives in the Forest Plan including the Even Aged Hardwood Forest (EH). This goal contributes to dispersed recreation (wildlife viewing, hiking, and hunting), and community partnerships. The Forest Plan also encourages vigorous forests via resource stewardship, functioning watersheds, varied habitat, and a diversity of plant and animal species.

Proposed Action(s) _____

The Forest Service is proposing the following actions in the Ramsey Branch project area:

- Thinning of 53 acres of shortleaf pine over story and shade tolerant species.
- Timber Stand Improvement (TSI) on 53 acres of smaller shade intolerant species. This would be a cut and leave timber activity.
- Reforest 53 acres of oak and hickories through natural regeneration.

Project Area _____

The pine stand is located within Compartment 27, Stand 12 and 13 (53 acres), (T12S, R6E, section 5), with the project area encompassing about 80 acres. It's located east of Eddyville, IL in Pope County. It is bounded by private property to the north, east and west. The southern boundary is comprised of county road 126.

Tribal Involvement _____

The NEPA process coordinates tribal consultation to address potential impacts or concerns related to traditional use or sacred sites as a result of project implementation. This coordination is designed to meet the requirements of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966 as amended, the American Indian Freedom of Religion Act, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act, and the

Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. If your tribe has information, comments, or concerns related to historic properties with traditional or religious significance pertaining to this project, please email them to comments-eastern-shawnee@fs.fed.us with the project name and Tribal Comment in the subject heading. You may also learn more about the project by visiting: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/shawnee/landmanagement/projects>.

Public Involvement

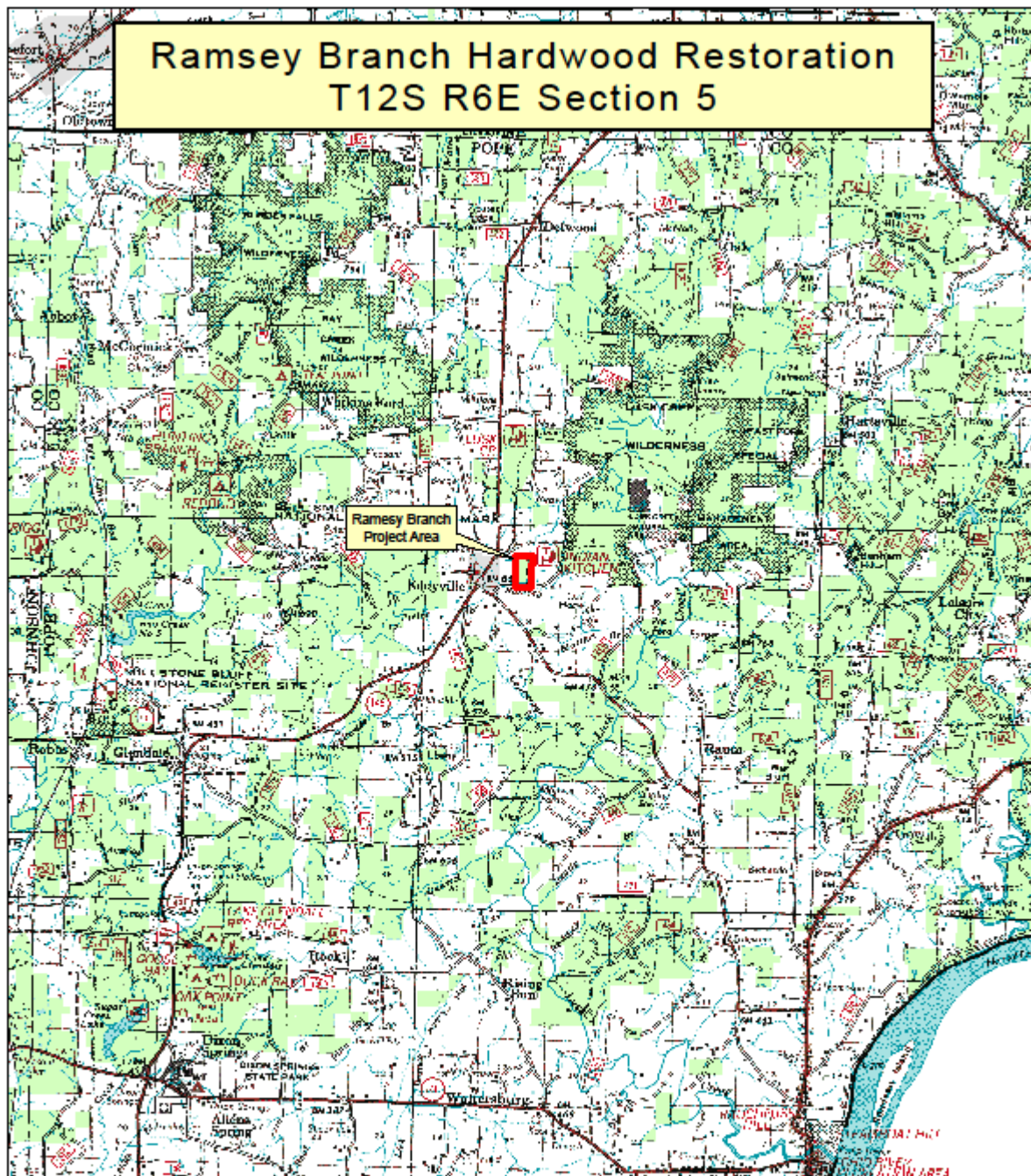
The public scoping process is to determine alternatives to be considered and issues to be addressed in the development of these proposed actions. These proposed actions are not decided issues. I invite your comments and suggestions about this project. Sharing specific concerns with us early in the process will lead to a collaborative approach in resolving those concerns. Please send your comments to: Shawnee National Forest, 50 Hwy. 145 South, Harrisburg, IL 62946; e-mail: comments-eastern-shawnee@fs.fed.us; telephone (618) 253-7114.

To be most useful, your comments should be received within 30 days of publication of the legal notice in The Southern Illinoisan Newspaper.

Sincerely,

/S/ TIM POHLMAN
District Ranger

Ramsey Branch Hardwood Restoration T12S R6E Section 5



Legend



Project Area



National Forest Land



Municipal

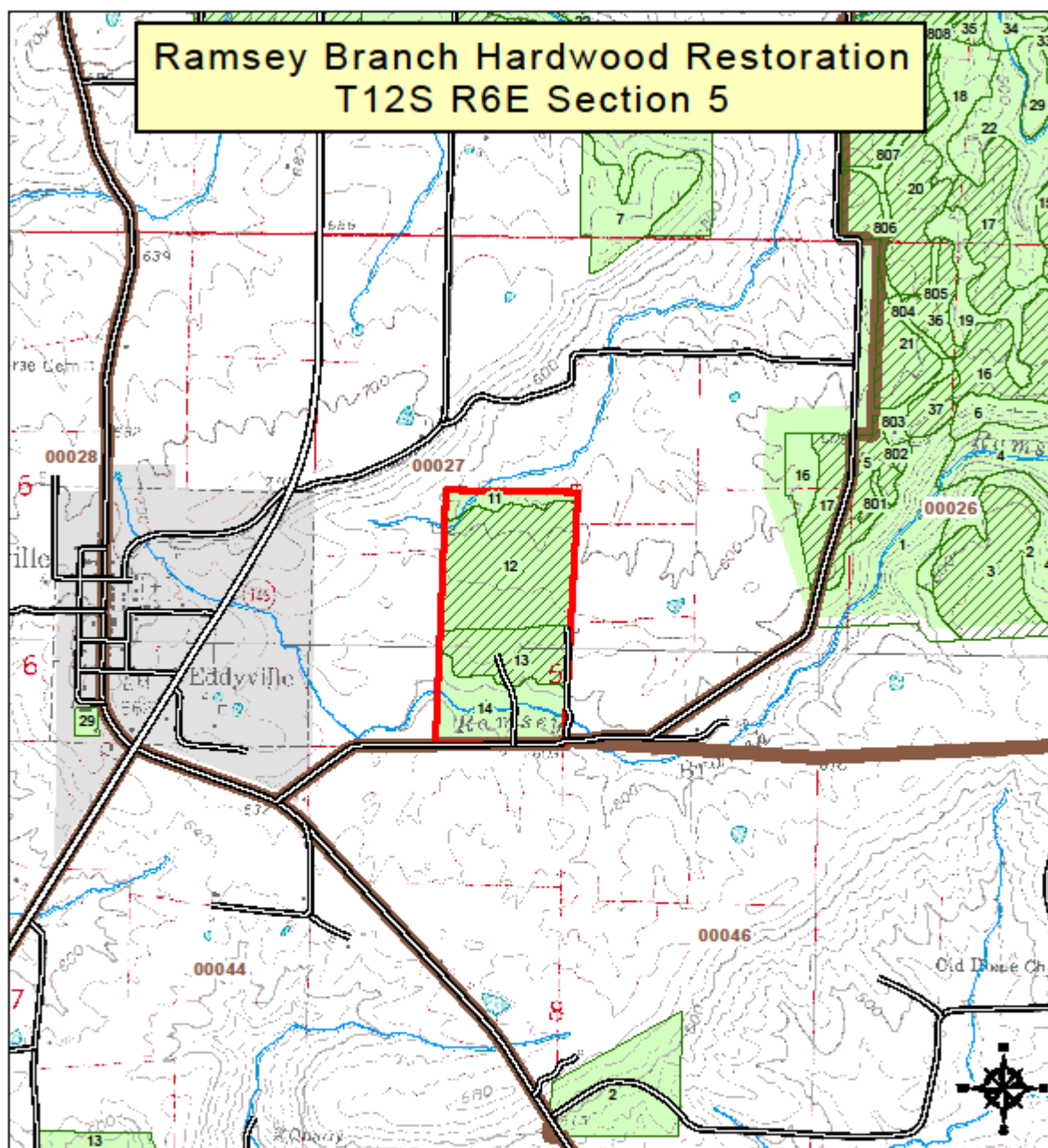
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